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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HARARE 000778

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NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR J. FRAZER, D. TEITELBAUM
LONDON FOR C. GURNEY
PARIS FOR C. NEARY
NAIROBI FOR T. PFLAUMER
DS/OP/AF

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/31/2014
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [ASEC](#) [ZI](#)
SUBJECT: NCA PLANNING DEMONSTRATION FOR MAY 12 IN DOWNTOWN
HARARE

REF: A. HARARE 752
[B](#). 2003 HARARE 2257

Classified By: Political Officer Audu Besmer for reasons 1.5 b/d

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: The National Constitutional Assembly (NCA) is planning a street demonstration in downtown Harare for May 12, but absent participation from other groups its prospects for success are limited. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (C) On May 5, NCA Director Dr. Lovemore Madhuku said the NCA called off a demonstration scheduled for the week before. The government-friendly Mirror reported that police had thwarted that "illegal" demonstration. Madhuku said they had actually assembled on the street but had decided not to wear t-shirts with protest slogans in the hope of melting into the crowd and avoiding arrest afterward. The lack of self-identification resulted in organizers failing to differentiate on the scene between demonstrators, and infiltrators; so the march never got going. NCA intended to return to wearing t-shirts for the planned May 12 event. The slogan will be, "no new elections without a new constitution".

[1](#)3. (C) The NCA has organized or participated in several street demonstrations, or failed protests over the past few years. Madhuku said they had recently been training a core group of about 1000 demonstrators to march and motivate members of the public to join in. Learning from past mistakes Madhuku said march organizers, who would not wear protest t-shirts, would carry cash for food and transportation for the whole group. The organizers in plainclothes would hopefully avoid arrest and be able to respond if others were arrested. Madhuku said those arrested or beaten in the past generally had all their cash and valuables stolen by police officers before formal processing. NCA also planned to set up a temporary command center because police had generally occupied NCA's main offices after a demonstration preventing many NCA members from seeking assistance there. Madhuku said they would arrange legal representation beforehand, and record license plate numbers of all police vehicles present before anything started.

[1](#)4. (C) Madhuku responded to criticism that the NCA had a reputation for "going it alone" when coordinated demonstrations with other civic groups and the MDC might be more effective. He said that since the November 2003 Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) failed demonstration (Ref B), when a who's who of Harare civic leaders was arrested, key civic groups and the MDC had met several times to plan coordinated action (Ref A). In February, MDC, ZCTU, NCA and the Zimbabwe Liberators' Platform (ZLP) agreed to go ahead with mass action in about April. Madhuku said that the MDC wanted to publicly announce a "common front", but the other groups were reluctant to be publicly associated with the opposition party. Madhuku said he told MDC leaders that the NCA could either participate in planning street level action, or mobilize its membership under an MDC plan - but the MDC had not responded yet to either proposal. The May 12 demonstration, Madhuku said, was in part designed to motivate MDC leaders to move ahead with mass action. Madhuku criticized MDC President Morgan Tsvangirai for making commitments, then not following through. He said Tsvangirai's commitments would often differ from Secretary

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General Welshman Ncube's -- it was hard to know what the party would do.

[1](#)5. (C) Madhuku said he thought MDC leaders were uncomfortable with the prospect that the NCA's prominence might threaten the MDC's should a coordinated demonstration succeed. Madhuku said the NCA had no interest in becoming a political party. He said if the MDC failed, with all the promise it had from winning 57 parliamentary seats in 2000, how could a smaller organization like the NCA succeed? He said that if the MDC came to power, NCA would continue as a watchdog group for constitutional reform. Madhuku said that despite rumors he was vying for a position in the MDC leadership, he had no

inclination to join the leadership of the opposition. He did say, however, that if he were offered a cabinet-level position in an MDC government he might accept it.

Comment:

16. (C) Most observers realize that work stoppages cannot be sustained for long periods of time and will not oust Mugabe from power, so civic organizations are considering protest marches. A small demonstration that did not invite a violent police crackdown could build confidence for a larger one. A police crackdown is highly likely, however, and arresting, beating and detaining NCA leaders and members is likely to damage confidence in further demonstrations rather than build it. NCA demonstrations in the past couple years have generally involved 15 - 200 people and their effectiveness has been very limited. A large coordinated demonstration has not really been attempted yet so coordination is a key issue for the NCA, the MDC, and other civic groups. Although there has been limited cross-organization participation in previous civil actions, and supportive press statements, there is little evidence so far that these key membership groups could agree enough to pull together large numbers of their people for a major march. In this repressive environment, failed demonstrations are more likely to scare people away from participating in the future, and build confidence within the security forces for future crackdowns.

SULLIVAN